

**TRADITIONAL
BURIAL RITE
(Okwu'Oche and Okwu'alekwu)**

in

Idomaland

By

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Introduction

The act of burial is a unique feature of African culture and this is replete with preparations which accompany burial in Idomaland, Nigeria and other parts of Africa. One can say that there is a biblical connotation to give the dead a befitting burial, as the Holy Bible in Ecclesiastes 7:2 stated that " it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting for that is the end of all men". Armed with this biblical provision, it is not out of place for an ethnic group to give a befitting burial to their dead loved ones, especially those ones believed to have lived to the peak of their life, i e, (3) three skulls and ten, seventy (70) years and above, because death is conceived as spiritual contraptions which are personified in bodily forms.

One may not wonder then, why befitting burial occupies a significant position in the culture of Idoma nation, most especially when Idoma people have a very strong belief and affiliation in Alekwu (spirit), that is what one (transits) becomes after death.

The concept of Alekwu in Idoma land does not yield to any easy translation. Generally, it is the ancestors or ancestral spirit. But the concept of ancestor or ancestral spirit is an inadequate translation of Alekwu, because they unnecessarily limit the concept to only those spirits of the ancestors of the living. However, the fact remains that a wider meaning of Alekwu applies to all the dead whether children, adult, men or women, and so it is, since in the spirit realm by death, they have joined the departed. Alekwu on this note simply refers to the spirit of the dead watching over the living (Anyebe, 1972). It is also believed that ancestral spirits are high gods and other non humans spirit contacted in dreams and in trances of spirit mediums. They are believed to give people information about the cause diseases, deaths, and other misfortunes and would sometimes prescribe medicines or ways to solve the problems.

Although, the origin of Alekwu tradition in Idomalaand is still shrouded in mystery, however, some scholars like Armstrong (1955), Anyebe (1972) and Erim (1981) are unanimous on some hypothesis in relation to the origin of Alekwu.

The first of such hypothesis linked the cult to the people who shared common origin, APA (the mythical home of Idoma) Igala, Igbira, Jukun and Abakwariga as contained in Armstrong (1955). The ancestral cult predated their migration and they probably maintained the tradition during their westward migration between 16th and 18th century. The second hypothesis indicated that the people seemed to have adopted this same tradition after settling in their present region. Generally, the ancestral cult could have spread from society to society. The third hypothesis suggested that the Idoma adopted the ancestral mask (Alekwu-afia) from Igbira in the 17th century when the chief of Igbira was superintending over APA 1 as contained in Erim (1981). However, the fourth and generally accepted view suggests that, the Idoma did not take this cult from anyone, rather they (Idoma) inherited it from APA ancestors (Erim, 1981).

This analysis is to acquaint any reader on the What, When, Where and How of Alekwu, which is why the dead deserves a befitting burial, so that they (Alekwu) having been properly laid to rest, can guide and protect the living. Emphasis of this presentation is however on the burial of

Oche (Chief) Okwu'oce and Okwu'alekwu which is not of general application to all Idoma land.

Methodology

This research study on traditional burial in Idoma land adopted the Expost Facto method and a qualitative situation analysis format (QSAF) with both primary and secondary data for the analysis. The primary data was procured through focus group discussions, interviews and participant observation. According to Obadan (2012) in observational survey, the researcher can either be a participant observer or a non-participant observer. The researcher has actively participated in burial in Idoma land for the past (35) thirty-five years and is still actively involved in burial rites in Idoma land, especially in Otukpo which is the focal point of this research study. In the course of the observation, topical and equally seminar issues were raised, posed and discussed. Answers provided by participants gave rise to data set used for this research work. Secondary data was procured from scholarly works of researchers on Idoma mythology, origin, anthropology and contemporary studies on Idoma nation. The technique used for analyzing the data obtained above was content analysis technique.

Historical Background of Idoma Nation

The Idoma speaking people of Nigeria occupy a wide geographical area in Benue-Cross River Basins. Idoma speaking people can be grouped into core and peripheral. The core Idoma consists of those Idoma speaking people which although scattered over a wide area speaks dialect of one language of Idoma. On the other hand, the peripheral Idoma include those groups which over the centuries have been assimilated into Idoma culture and therefore share common traits with some dialectical variations (Erim, 1981).

The core Idoma is today located within three different states. The states are Benue, Nasarawa, and Cross River state. Within Benue state, Idoma inhabits nine (9) local government areas. They are Ado, Agatu, Apa, Obi, Oju, Ogbadibo, Okpokwu, Otukpo and Ohimini local government areas. Furthermore, in Gboko local government area, such groups as Etulo which also spread into Katsina-Ala local government area have the same geneological lineage with Idoma (Erim, 1981).

In Nasarawa state, the Doma, Keana, Alosi, Obi and Agwatashi have the same lineage with Idoma. In Cross River, the Iyala of Ogoja, Ikom and Obubra local government areas are also of Idoma extraction. In these areas, there is a major difference in dialectical composition of Idoma language (Erim,1981). Thus, the core Idoma is scattered over a wide arc from Keana, east of Lafia town through Doma of Nasarawa state and ending up with the Iyala and Ukum in Ogoja local government area of Cross River State. For the peripheral Idoma, the arc widened to include the Ito and Oju of modern day Igede, Akpa and Akweya which dialectically are distinct from the core Idoma (Agbo, 2018). Indeed, the distribution of the peripheral Idoma

includes the Ntezi and Akpoto of Abakaliki in the present day Ebonyi state. The Ette of Nsukka in Enugu state also forms part of this group (O'kwu,1976).

The Idoma ethnic group are about 2 million according to the last census conducted by the National Population Commission, which is highly contestable (NPC,2006, Anyebe, 2015). Otukpo is the traditional seat and centre of Idoma land. This is where the Och'idoma resides. The Och'idoma is both the traditional and spiritual father of the whole Idoma nation.

With the advantage of fertile soil and a good climate which guaranteed an average rain fall of over sixty (60) inches in a year, agriculture is thus the main stay of Idoma nation. This is with the aid of local farming implements and it is predicated on family labour. According to Mr. Abu Onuh, an 80 years old retired headmaster, markets and other forms of money are ancient here, though, there are isolated cases of trade by barter in the villages which share boundary with the Tiv speaking areas like Otukpo village (Emichi), Adoka, Umogidi, Opaha, Odugbo and Ikobi on one side and Naka, Torgbenda Agagbe and Tarku on the other side. Also, institutions as slavery and men age grade society existed here. Wars between villages on both sides of the divide were endemic here until the emergence of the British administration. Infact tribal wars persisted until the early 90s, Eluma Odumu an 83 years old retired Naval officer from Umogidi said that he has prosecuted one of such wars before.

Political Organization

The earliest batch of colonial officials in Idoma land prior to the Second World War viewed the Idoma alongside other middle belt people whom they generally termed as primitive pagans, as people who are incapable of organizing themselves both socially and politically (Anyebe, 2002). The Idoma people were allotted the bottom position in their categorization of the primitive pagan people of the middle belt. To them, the Idoma people were barbaric people, ill tempered, intransigent and of low intelligence (Agbo, 2018). Agbo (2018) further argued that the reason for this negative impression about the Idoma people can only be situated in the British imperialist philosophy which reserves the word primitive for those conquered regions that lacked suitable or readymade structures for colonial exploitation. Thus, the Northern Nigeria with its centralized autocracy which made possible the implementation of the indirect rule policy is to be appreciated by the British colonial officials (O'kwu, 1976).

The reality of the pre-colonial Idoma society can best be seen in the light of the following submission made by Elaigwu (1982)" Idoma..... in traditional or pre-colonial period fit roughly between chiefdom and a state. The central coordinating body has the Och'idoma at the helm of affairs. Assisting the Och'idoma in this task of governance are his council of chief known as the Ai'igabo, made up of the various district heads'' (Elaigwu, 1982, p.9).

Conceptual Clarification

Embarking in research on traditional burial (okwu'oche and okwu'alekwu) in Idoma land requires concept definition of certain key concepts that will put the study in the right perspective. Such key concepts are; Culture, Death, Burial, etc.

Culture

Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in English, and already there over three hundred definitions of the word culture. It is what Michael Faucault in Nasidi (2010) calls a repetition of the same. According to him, everything there is to say have been said, the rest is repetition. From this submission by the above scholar, one is constrained to give some few working definitions of culture as far as this research is concerned.

The cultural policy for Nigeria (1988) in part 1, section 1(1) defines culture as the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbors. The policy further stated that culture comprises material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects. UNESCO (1982) defines culture as including the complex whole of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional feature that characterized a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value system, traditions and beliefs. The two definitions above are unanimous on the material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects of culture; these are basically the defining ethos of any society. According to Okita (1990) culture is the arts, customs and beliefs and all other products of human thoughts made by a people at a particular time. Magid (1978) asserts that culture is heritage, it is property or object inherited, allotted or handed down as by ancestors, as physical, natural, tangible or intangible stock or endowment. From above definitions, it is clear that burial forms part of Idoma tradition haven being in practice over a long period of time. Gbilekaa (2013) in his work stated that culture is the value and bonds that bind a society. He stated that it is learned and passed from the older generation to the younger one through symbols, language arts, religion etc. From the foregoing, it is clear that burial is a cultural practice among the Idoma people, having being practiced by them since the emergence of the Idoma ethnic nationality over 2000 years ago (Agbo in Agaba,2018).

Death: The People's Belief

To an Idoma man or woman, death is a transition from the physical world, a threshold. It is believed that this journey into the spirit world is made across a particular river by canoe. In that way, a certain amount of money is paid to the canoe man as transport fare. This particular belief informed the giving of money to a deceased person lying in state in Idoma land. According to Oyinu Ogli, the money so given is to enable the deceased pay the fare across the river to the other side of life (Oyinu Ogli). In Idoma land, burial reflects the people's belief in life after death. This is shown variously in beliefs like re-incarnation, giving pepper seed to a dead person presumed to have been too kind or weak in this world, that the person's next time around he should be as hot as pepper. Ben seed grains are also given to those who were barren in this world. With the rites performed, those barren are expected to be productive in their next world.

According to Godwin Edeikwu, anyone presumed to have been killed by someone, that his/her death is not natural will be given a hatchet. In such a situation, before the body of the deceased is lowered, the relatives will instruct the dead that "three days is the day of vengeance, seven days and fourteen days are all days of vengeance". That whoever is responsible for the death of the deceased should be made to confess and die within the above mentioned days. Confessions and deaths have resulted from this practice severally according to my key informant in this research (Godwin Edeikwu).

Burial

Burial, according to Oxford English Dictionary is a dead body, a funeral, a grave or its remains. Burial is the interment of the remains of a person. Burial is expressly provided for in the bible as Ecclesiastes 7:2 stated that, it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. So, giving a befitting burial as it is done in the Idoma land as part of their culture is in tandem with biblical injunction.

Types of Burial in Idoma Land

There are different types of burial in Idoma land. Burial vary from one Idoma community to another. For the purpose of this research, emphasis will be on the burial of chief (Oche) Okwu'оче and Okwu'alekwu. However, the following are the different categories of burial in Idoma land;

- (a) Burial of an infant- from birth to the age of 15 years.
- (b) Burial of persons below the age of 40 years.
- (c) Burial of mentally unstable persons
- (d) Burial of TB Patients, Epileptic feet and thunder victims.
- (e) Burial of someone drowned in the river.
- (f) Burial of Oche/ Okwu'оче and Okwu'alekwu.

Burial Rites

Burial rites commence from the announcement of death. This is done in various ways depending on the situation on ground. Announcing death depends on the individuals involved. As classified and stated above, the death of an infant or someone below the age of forty (40) years may not necessarily follow the basic rules of burial in Idoma land. The reason for this is because usually, the person who gets to know about the death of an infant or someone within that age bracket above is normally given away by emotion. This emotional outburst which is by way of crying is the means through which others will come to know about that particular death. For a mentally unstable person, epilepsy, thunder victim, someone drowned in the river

and anybody who committed suicide etc, such an emotional outburst is forbidden. These classes of deaths are not supposed to be mourned. One is not expected to cry for these categories of death. It attracts punishment/sanction, and if inevitably, you were betrayed by emotion, after the burial, incantations will be made and some rites performed. After which water will be provided in a central bucket for those who cried to wash their face. Anybody who died from the above mentioned type of death is regarded as bad death and therefore not allowed to be buried at home. As for thunder victim, nobody is allowed to touch the corpse until rain maker will be called in to perform the necessary rites for the burial to take place. Thunder victim must be buried with one finger pointing up to the sky.

However, there is what is called "Recall" (oo'higwu), this is to bring the spirit of those not properly buried back home. This can be done after about two to three years after the demise of the deceased and at the convenience of the family because it goes with a cost. It is a celebration that is performed during Eje'aje (festival to appease the land) and Eje'alekwu festival. During this rite of recall, food, drinks, dance and merry making is the order of the day. According to my informant, Elder Oche Imanche, these rites of recall is for all the above categories except for burial of people below the age of (40) forty. As for someone drowned in the river, the corpse must be buried by the river side. The reason for burying by the riverside is to forestall the consequences of the river overflowing its bank to remove the corpse which is regarded as belonging to the river. Rules regarding these burials are strictly adhered to in order to forestall any repercussion occurring there from (Otache Ekah).

It is important to note that in Idoma land, there is no central burial ground or cemetery. Anybody who died will be buried within the family compound. Furthermore, any Idoma person who died anywhere in the world must not be buried outside unless someone who is a teenager or a soldier killed in the warfront. An Idoma lady married to non Idoma must be brought home to be buried after her demise, unless expressly agreed during the marriage that she can be buried in her husband's place when she dies. When an agreement of this nature exists, after the burial, a traditional rite called "Ahonya" will be brought back to her father's house. It involves bringing to the public whatever she has before her demise and the person who is supposed to inherit the property will make sacrifice and take whatever he/she wants and leave the rest for the children.

Burial of Oche (chief) Okwu'oche

Many African kingdoms are based on lineage systems in such a way that a group of corporate lineage forms the constituent units of the state. The problem then arises as to how a chief who is himself a member of one of the lineages can achieve at least plausibly the necessary generality of interest to enable him function as the chief officer of the whole. One solution to this problem is that seen in many states which are the establishment of a specialized royal lineage and whose function it is to provide chiefs successively. This is usually the kind of system found in the large and wealthier states. This is surely a very ancient pattern and it is found in nearly pure form in several districts in Idoma land (O'kwu, 1976). In ancient times and up till this moment, Idoma consisted of (30) thirty lands (Aje) and they regard themselves as being related to each other genealogically. They are typically constituted by two, three or

four lineages (ipo'oopu or ipo'oonu) which are the effective land owing units and which holds the kingship of the land in rotation. There is usually one or more stranger lineage in the land who is also subject to the chief, but who may not be able to produce a chief. This system of rotation ensures that the chief may not necessarily be the most senior elder in his own lineage, he rather hold the stool in trust since he is chosen by them, he acts on their behalf, when he speaks, he enunciates their decisions. The chief is not the lineage head, though chosen by his lineage first and then adopted by other lineages. Although he is chosen by the lineages, his stand between them and his responsibility is general and to the whole land (Aje) (Anyebe, 1972).

At installation, he assumes office by an act of symbolic death (he is presumed dead) he dies to his family and the lineage attachments. He will be taken into solitude for (14) fourteen days within which he will not eat food for seven days. While in solitary confinement, other installation rituals and rites are performed. The essence of this is to douse his quest for acquisition of material wealth. As a mediator between the different lineages, he should not have materialistic tendencies otherwise he is bound to give partial judgment over matters concerning his subjects. During this period of installation, many ceremonies are performed and finally his compound is ransacked and sacked. He loses everything, both personal and other belongings to the society as a whole (Agbo, 2018). An ancestral masquerade performs this function. He loses his personal identity and also loses the obligation that he owes to individuals and his own family. He becomes the general son of the land. He becomes the chief owing no property of his own, but as the chief he owns the whole land and its citizens. The chief's status is marked by certain traditional regalia of which a bracelet of choral beads of red and black color is the most essential.

Process of Announcing the Death of Oche/Okwu'оче

When a chief dies, his eldest son sends message to the elders of different lineages that the chief has gone to the bush for either hunting or to take herbs, whichever pleases him. The elders in response hasten to the bush to prepare his hunting-hut in the bush at the royal burial place called Ikpamili or Oodooko, depending on the part of Idoma, It should be noted that apart from the Ikpamili or Oodooko for chiefs, there is no burial ground in Idoma land for chiefs/Oche. Any burial is within the family land, but where the chief (oche) is actually buried is never known or disclosed. It still remains a mystery in Idomaland till this moment.

The elders will meet at the burial place where the corpse will be lying-in state. The elders then send to the eldest daughter of the chief that she should come and prepare gruel for her father to drink in the bush. The eldest daughter goes to sit beside the corpse. Any person who is aware of the death may not cry including the daughter. If she weeps even once, she must give a goat to the elders. The elders send a messenger to see that the eldest daughter of the chief who is sitting down with the corpse complies with the no crying order. The messenger may meet her with red eyes as a result of crying, but she will say that it is smoke that has affected her. The

messenger must feed the elders back. The wives are not involved in the burial process. They just stay back in their rooms (Oyegwa Amanyi).

The elders (kingmakers) send a messenger to his eldest son saying that they have not heard from the bush to which his father has gone, whether he has died or not. The eldest son will say, please, if he has died, dig some earth and put on him for me. They will tell him to go and bring a goat to them. He will go and bring a goat and the elders will tell those of female attachment (those from the chief's mother side, maternal relations) to bury the chief. After the burial, the elders will go back home to be in the elders enclosure within the chief's compound. The elders will stay in the chief's enclosure for up to (14) fourteen days. Within this period, they will kick start the process of picking another chief. Their stay will be marked by the killing of several cows by the late chief's children and the new chief to be (ALAPA)(Adakole Enokela).

Okwu'Alekwu

Anybody buried as an okwu'alekwu is deemed to have lived a long and fulfilled life. It is the wish of every Idoma man with Alekwu'afia tradition to be buried as an Okwu'alekwu. Part of Idoma land that has the culture of Alekwu'afia are; Otukpo, Umogidi, Ugbokpo just to mention these few.

Announcing the death of someone who is qualified to be buried as an Oku'alekwu and those who died at the ripe age is called Uja'ota (announcement of death). This is done exactly at midnight by gunshot which is followed with crying by the immediate family of the deceased. After about 30-45 minutes of crying, different dance groups will take over procession until daybreak. This is called Ogboo'eche which literally means wake keep. Announcing the death of an Okwu'alekwu is very unique. The most senior son or the eldest in the lineage goes to tell the chief and his Igabo (council of elders) about the death and nobody shall say any other thing about it. It is also important to note that at death, the family has the liberty to take the corpse to the mortuary these days as against those old good days, the corpse can be buried without any ceremony (Okwu'ochee). By this arrangement, there was nothing like mortuary. In fact, most of the deceased will always express their unwillingness to be kept in the mortuary, which they referred to as refrigerator after death. This had led to many of them being buried immediately after death, a case in point was the death of late Akoche, the father of Mr. Ameh Akoche, one time chairman of Apa local government area, then other ceremonies will follow later as decided by the chief and the relatives of the deceased person.

However, Ogboo'eche is an all night affair. Relatives and children of the deceased will be up and doing to ensure that there is enough food and drinks for guests. Also, dancers are periodically spread with money. Apart from the food and drinks provided by the family, there is usually a market for whoever wants to buy anything, ranging from beer, cigarettes, kola nut, recharged cards to assorted foods. It is usually a beehive of activities till day break. In a situation where the corpse has not been buried, aged women who have attained menopause will stay with the corpse at the Itakpa (meeting point of the family) and the most senior wife of the deceased. This group of women is called the "Ichicha". They sing and dance round the corpse till morning. While doing this, they are equally spread with money by the relatives, children

and well wishers of the deceased and provided with food and drinks till day break. The practice is such that these women will collect food materials on credit in anticipation of the money they are going to make from the burial. At whatever level one wants to look at it, this group of women usually goes home with money ranging from 2,000.00 up which they can not ordinarily make from any menial job embarked upon according to my informant (Alache Icha).

The men folk during this Ogboo'eche apart from drinking will also be coordinating most of the activities. There is however a specific dance that is performed exclusively by men. It is called Oogba. It usually starts by 12;00pm and last till 5;00am. Oogba is a pattern less dance for the deceased for a life well spent at 2:00am, the leader of the dance group is presented with a very big ram aside the drinks that is meant for the group. The ram so presented will be slaughtered and cooked for eating. The dance continues until the meat is ready for consumption usually between 4:00-4:30 am. Of particular importance is that, this meat will be shared among those present. If you are seated within the group and you fall asleep, nobody will wake you up to part take in eating the meat. Even if you are the leader of the group and you sleep off within that time, nobody will wake you up neither will your share of the meat be kept for you. After eating the meat, the dance continues until day break (Oyinu Ogli).

After this wake keep, people will disperse to freshen up and come back around 10:00am. The people will converge at Ipoopu (village square) for (Ikpela'ookwu) this will be preceded by interment. This is where the family of the deceased will bring out what they will put on the corpse, i.e. cloths; shoes, caps etc, and also determine that which will be left out for inheritance. Some people will want the corpse to be buried with their cloth depending on their relationship prior to his demise. Whatever that is agreed on at the gathering is what goes with the corpse. Chiefs generally do not attend burial, but he is usually represented by his most senior Igabo (one of the kingmakers).

Preparing Okwu'alekwu for Burial

Dressing Okwu'alekwu for burial is an aspect that is handled by experts and specialist to avoid mistake and dire consequences. It is not just anybody that does the dressing. Older men and women who are above menopause are saddled with the task and responsibility of dressing Okwu'alekwu. One very important aspect of Okwu'alekwu is the role of ancestral masquerade. The deceased being the last of his/her siblings, the masquerade will literally be buried with the deceased. Other masquerades in the community will go in search of the particular lineage's masquerade in the village and when eventually found, certain incantations are made by the masquerade (Ekwu'afia) before the burial. This process is called Ekwu-cho'okele. Literally, it is dancing round the deceased compound and bidding it farewell. This is because, from them, such a masquerade will cease to appear and perform during subsequent ceremonies in the community. It should be noted that during this burial, different masquerades will appear, some of which are Ekwu'afia, Owunna, Achukwu among others. Women within reproductive age are forbidden from being around during the burial according to my informant (Otache Ekah). Disobedience to this rule has resulted in dire consequences and it also attracts heavy punishment.

Another very important aspect of burial in general and Okwu'alekwu in particular is Obulego which in modern times is referred to as undertakers. They are numbered between six to ten able bodied men who are in charge of digging the grave and also performing the final burial. Their work is in two segments. First, they will be shown where to dig the grave by the members of the deceased family. They will first dig the grave and disperse for other rites to be performed, and then their next appearance will be to cover the grave. There are two types of graves in Idoma land. Those for ordinary people, and those for Okwu'alekwu. It is important to highlight the grave for Okwu'alekwu because of its uniqueness. The grave is cylindrically vertical ie, 6ft down and then, a parlor sort of is created and his personal belongings will be kept inside there. Casket is not used for Okwu'alekwu.

After dressing, the corpse (Okwu) will be made to sit on a small pot. The most senior son of the deceased will hold the end of the cloth (ochu) used to wrap the corpse and he will hold it like that for almost an hour while other rites are being performed. The first son's inability to carry out his role stated above stripes him of his seniority in the family. If the younger brother has the temerity to perform this rite, he will be automatically recognized as the most senior in the family. The next most important part is the final interment. But, before the final burial, a he-goat or ram will be slaughtered (Oogwu'ulaka) immediately after the corpse will be taken across the blood of the slaughtered ram to the grave for burial. It should however be noted that burial in Idoma land is a community project. The community does not allow the bereaved family to shoulder the whole responsibility of providing entertainment to sympathizers as the people are grouped together and made to cook food two times in a day for seven days and the arrangement will be reviewed by the elders. The researcher as a participant observer has the responsibility of paying #500.00 as part of his contribution when someone dies in his community. Noncompliance has severally resulted in the refusal of the community in participating in the burial of members of the community brought from outside and also attracts severe punishment. This is to serve as a deterrent to other erring members of the community residing outside who may have defaulted in paying their burial dues.

Specifically in Idoma land, nobody is to be buried outside his/her village, no matter the circumstances surrounding the death. Whether the death is in a far away England or America, the corpse must be brought back home for burial. Burying the dead outside is regarded as a big insult on the immediate family, if inevitably, the corpse cannot be seen, certain rites must be performed and the (Ahonya) part of his belongings, will be brought home. This could be any of his belongings. Furthermore, a woman married from outside the village is not expected to be buried in the village after her demise, unless with the approval of the woman's immediate family.

Significance of Three, Seven and fourteen Days after Burial in Idoma Land

The three set of days mentioned above, i.e., three days, seven days and fourteen days are very significant days in burial rites in Idoma land. After interment, sympathizers usually spend some hours with the family of the bereaved. This is majorly to create the opportunity for mourners and sympathizers to be entertained, eating, exchanging banter because, burial usually brings people from far and near and, also from all walks of life. Dancing and other activities will also

follow. Most of these sympathizers often leave after some hours, leaving the close relatives of the deceased who will remain behind for some days. The lengths of time or the number of days the mourners spend depend on how close their affinity is to the deceased. The highest number of days relatives are allowed to mourn their loved ones is fourteen days, and this is for those that are really close, like sisters and brothers. Some distance family members will usually leave after three days. The importance of three days is that, in the olden days, the tomb will be plastered using mud. This is done amidst singing and possibly dancing. This practice is rarely observed these days as most tombs are tiled, and the moment the corpse is lowered, blocks will be used to cover up the remaining space, however, where the corpse was lowered through will still be plastered on the third day, so it can be said that the practice has been slightly altered by modernity. While on the seventh day, people will still come around to where the deceased was buried and some rites will still be observed. Seven days (Oheebi) after burial is very significant, because on that day, the deceased property(s) will be brought out before the members of the family. Anybody who owes the deceased money or anything will come out and admit so, if not, the spirit of the deceased will go after that person or so it is believed. In the olden days, there will be incantations and the person who is supposed to inherit the properties will come forward and take the things he/she likes and leave the remaining ones for the children.

However, modernity has crept in and nowadays, prayers will be offered by either the church leader or pastor as the case maybe, water will be sprinkled on the properties physically available, though symbolic, it covers every other thing the deceased has while he/she was alive. Findings reveal that the dead are conceived as spiritual contraption which is personified in body forms. As a result, they are guarded passionately and jealously. People's understanding of the world around them is sustained by the peculiarities of their belief system, which is their culture. This belief plays functional roles in Idoma people's lives.

In the case of okwu'alekwu, on the day of the burial proper, nothing like burial rite was done by the people, but activities of that day is exclusively by alekwu. Whatever that was done on this particular day is by the circle to which the okwu'alekwu belongs; if you like call it cult, your guess is as good as mine. So anything that has to be done by the deceased family is reserved until the seventh day. Those who were not able to come for the burial proper because of restrictions, like some group of women are not allowed because of the presence of masquerades (alekwu) which they are forbidden from seeing, will on the seventh day have the opportunity to pay their last respect to the deceased. On the fourteenth day some unresolved issues will be re resolved and anything pertaining to the death will be resolved. The day is also used for thanking those who stood by the family at their moment of grief (Oche Eka). It can be seen that Idoma people's belief in life after death has greatly shaped the way befitting burial is accorded to the departed ones. It is important to note that processes in Idoma traditional burial rite is a practice that is treasured by the people, its violation has dire consequences for whosoever violates it.

Conclusion

Burial holds different meanings to the Idoma as an ethnic group. While some parts of Idoma land hold this tradition in high esteem, other parts of Idoma land no longer see the relevance

of traditional burial as was practiced in those days and most especially with the advent of Christian religion which has dominated all facets of life in Idoma land. Most people have as a result of this modernity embraced the Christian way of burial which according to them is more civilized as against the old fetish way of burial. This belief by the modernists is however borne out of ignorance as the tradition which is part of the rich culture of the people is what is manifested at the traditional burial.

However, Christian burial as it were have its attendant problems some of which are as follows; how can one come to terms with the issue of cladding people in new cloths (uniform) when mourning. The concept of mourning in Idoma land is that you are bereaved and as such, one who is bereaved is supposed to be sober, solemn and unkempt as against the idea of wearing new cloth which negates the concept of mourning in Idoma land. Christianity has also eliminated the idea of sympathizing and empathizing with the bereaved family for at least 14 (fourteen) days which is the mandatory mourning period in traditional Idoma burial. This is in keeping with the communal spirit of being one's brother's keeper and also being one's neighbor.

It can therefore be said that the art of traditional burial in Idomaland has suffered the fate of some of our cultural arts which modernism or modernists generally dismissed as primitive irrespective of its significance to the lives of the people. This means another defeat of our tradition by modernist and imposing their own culture and making sure that they down played anything African thereby elevating their own culture over and above our own culture.

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Interviews Conducted

Name	Date	Place
1. Mr. Abuh Onuh	15/10/2021	Opaha, Apa L.G.A

2. Elder Oyinu Ogli	15/10/2021	Opaha, Apa L.G A
3. Eluma Odumu	2/12/2022	Umogidi, Otupko L.G.A
4. Godwin Edeikwu	3/12/2019	Opaha, Apa L. G. A
5. Oche Imanche	15/6/2019	Adoka, OtukpoL.G.A
6. Otache Ellah	15/6/2019	Otukpo L.G.A
7. Oyegwa Elaigwu	18/6/2019	Otukpo L.G.A
8. Eicha Adakole	19/6/2019	Otukpo L.G.A
9. Alache Icha	20/6/2019	Otukpo L.G.A
10. Uche James Ekah	10/6/2023	Otukpo L.G.A